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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2016

TAGS: PARM PREL MNUC KS KN

SUBJECT: ROK OFFERS TO EXPAND PSI PARTICIPATION, WITHOUT
ENDORSING PSI

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ALEXANDER R. VERSHBOW. REASON: 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) On November 1, Park Sun-won, Secretary to the President for National Security Strategy, outlined for the DCM a new ROK proposal for its participation in PSI. He said the South Korean Government would soon announce three responses to the October 9 North Korean nuclear weapons test:

1) Measures the ROK government will take consistent with UNSCR 1718; 2) Unilateral ROKG punitive measures; and 3) Expanded ROK participation in PSI. Park did not elaborate on the first two, but said that after three weeks of heated political debate, the ROK proposed to increase ROK participation in PSI. The key line of its announcement would read: "The Korean government will continue to expand its scope of participation in PSI through information exchange, asset contribution, and participation in related meetings." Park made it clear his proposal was designed to increase ROK participation in PSI without provoking a military clash with the North or arousing a domestic outcry. Because of those concerns, Park said the ROKG had decided it would not endorse the PSI Statement of Interdiction Principles, but indicated the ROK was willing to work closely with the United States and others to share intelligence, more closely monitor its own ports, and support the interdiction of any North Korean vessels transporting WMD, provided the interdiction took place outside of Korean territorial waters.

¶2. (S) In a follow-on conversation with the Ambassador, National Security Advisor Song Min-soon underscored that endorsing the PSI principles was a bridge too far at this point since it was equated to ROK involvement in maritime interdiction in the public debate. But the ROK would fully participate in all PSI activities, Song added. The Ambassador pushed back, saying "full participation" in PSI was only for countries that endorsed the principles, and urged Song to keep working the issue.

ROKG Preparing Response to DPRK Nuclear Test

¶3. (S) On November 1, 2006, the DCM and POL-MIL Chief met with Secretary to the President for National Security Strategy Dr. Park Sun-won (at Park's request) to receive a preview of the South Korean Government's soon-to-be announced policy on participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Park began by expressing appreciation for the U.S. Government's decision to go forward with the October 31 meeting in Beijing among EAP Assistant Secretary Hill, his North Korean counterpart Kim Gye-gwan, and Chinese VFM Wu Dawei.

¶4. (S) Dr. Park stated that the South Korean Government would soon announce the measures it will take in response to the North Korean nuclear weapons test of October 9. There would be three parts to that announcement, he said:

- Measures the ROK government will take consistent with UNSCR 1718;
- Unilateral punitive measures the ROK government will take; and
- Expanded ROK participation in PSI.

Park did not elaborate on what the first two announcements would entail, but instead turned his attention to explaining the new ROK proposal on PSI.

Heated Political Debate

¶5. (S) Dr. Park noted that intense inter-agency discussions had been taking place during the past three weeks within the ROKG over whether, and how, to increase South Korea's support for, and participation in, PSI. He said that ruling Uri Party leaders had intervened in that discussion in ways that were "not helpful, but were necessary" for the government to gain their understanding. There were "many voices" on the issue; some believed full participation in PSI was the best option, others were more cautious, but even they viewed PSI as a legitimate activity and believed the ROK had to play a more important role in the nonproliferation efforts of the international community, Park explained. He went on to describe various reasons why the ROK was taking a cautious approach toward PSI. North-South relations were tricky and the Korean Peninsula was a volatile place, with the potential for military clashes along the DMZ, Military Demarcation

Line, as well as within disputed maritime boundaries, Park elaborated. He cited North-South clashes at sea in 1999 and 2002 as examples. Please understand, Park pleaded, that South Korea was not capitulating to the North, but had to consider carefully what the DPRK's reaction might be to any actions they took, adding that South Korea is still technically in a state of war with the North.

Expanded Support For PSI

¶6. (S) Dr. Park told the DCM he had prepared an announcement of increased ROK participation in PSI, stressing that it was only a preliminary draft, but that he had discussed its content with National Security Advisor, and Foreign Minister-designate, Song Min-soon. He said he was unable to hand over the one page draft, but then read it to the DCM. It began by emphasizing the ROK's commitment to halt the proliferation of WMD, and went on to say the ROKG was actively taking part in various multilateral nonproliferation regimes, including NPT, MTCR, and Wassenaar. The ROK likewise supported PSI's objectives and had taken part as an observer in PSI exercises, Park continued. (NOTE: Most recently, the ROK sent a three-person observer team to the October 29-31 LEADING EDGE exercise in the Persian Gulf. END NOTE). As a result, the ROK believed it was already "participating" in PSI, Park asserted.

¶7. (S) Continuing, Dr. Park said that President Roh put the highest value on stopping "vertical proliferation" through denuclearization of the DPRK via the Six-Party Talks, as well as supporting the global effort to prevent "horizontal proliferation" of WMD through the use of PSI. Therefore, Park read, "The Korean government will continue to expand its scope of participation in PSI through information exchange, asset contribution, and participation in related meetings." He added that "Furthermore, the ROKG is already conducting thorough inspections to restrict the flow of terror-related weapons into and out of its ports, and will continue to strengthen such efforts."

¶8. (S) Making it clear his proposal was an attempt to

increase ROK participation in PSI without causing a military clash with the North, or domestic criticism, Park explained that he had carefully examined how to "compromise between South Korea's firm commitment to halt proliferation of WMD and the particularity of the Korean Peninsula and its divided nation."

But Will Not Endorse Statement of Interdiction Principles

¶19. (S) Pressed by the DCM on whether or not the ROK would also endorse the PSI Statement of Interdiction Principles, Park clearly indicated that would not be an element of the ROK announcement. "Endorse" was a very strong term in the Korean language," he claimed, because it implied a new legal obligation. The DCM replied that PSI participants were free to act within the confines of their own national legal authorities and international commitments. Park appeared aware of this point, but indicated that endorsement of PSI would be seen as going too far in the eyes of key political players, and his leaders wanted to quell the domestic debate.

¶10. (S) Pressed further on how the ROK would respond to various proliferation scenarios, Park said that if credible intelligence were received that WMD was being shipped to or from North Korea, the ROKG would share that information with the United States and would want us to interdict the suspect vessel, provided it was done outside Korean territorial waters. What if the ship was passing within your territorial waters?, the DCM asked. "Then we would ask you to wait a few hours" (until the DPRK ship reached the high seas), Park replied.

¶11. (S) The DCM thanked Dr. Park for sharing his proposal with the USG. He welcomed ROK willingness to increase the level of its support for, and involvement in, PSI. He cautioned, however, that Washington would likely be disappointed to hear the ROK remained unwilling to endorse the PSI Statement of Interdiction Principles. He stressed that PSI remained an important international effort involving 77 countries around the world; that PSI made no demands on the ROK inconsistent with its national authorities and international commitments; and that by failing to endorse PSI fully, the ROKG was missing an opportunity to send a signal to North Korea that it would not tolerate proliferation of

weapons of mass destruction.

¶12. (S) Evidencing the continuing interagency debate within the South Korean government, Dr. Park asked us not to share the content of his draft announcement with the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¶13. (S) COMMENT: It is clear the ROK had made an effort to respond to the Secretary's request to join PSI delivered during her October visit to Seoul. Given the domestic political situation, however, the Roh Administration does not want to go any further than this, at least for now. Of course Roh's own views have impeded a better understanding of PSI within Korean society. This is a disappointing outcome, particularly in light of the effort we made in meeting with the DPRK in Beijing on October 31. Embassy recommends we reply to the ROK with dissatisfaction and continue to press the Blue House to fully endorse PSI. END COMMENT.

VERSHBOW